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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/E NATSIOS
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR, AND ALSO PASS USAID

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR PREF SU
SUBJECT: ERITREAN OPPOSITION LEADER CONCERNED ABOUT REFUGEES IN
SUDAN RETURNING TO WAR

REF: KHARTOUM 1872

¶1. (U) In a meeting with EconOff November 29, the chairman of the Eritrean Nahda Party, Noor M. Idris, claimed that hundreds of Eritrean refugees arrive in Sudan every day from Eritrea and Ethiopia, and estimated that there are over 200,000 Eritreans living in Sudan. Idris expressed concern for the welfare of these Eritreans, and claimed that in October Sudan forcibly returned 69 refugees to Eritrea, two of which were shot and killed by Eritrean soldiers on the border. Idris predicted that tensions will rise between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the coming weeks and claimed that 120,000 Eritrean troops have already deployed to the Ethiopian border. (Note: There were reports last week that 900 Eritrean soldiers came over the border into Sudan to escape fighting with Ethiopian troops. End Note.) Idris called on the U.S. to "start contingency planning for the likelihood that war will start again between Sudan's neighbors."

¶2. (SBU) Idris told EconOff he is actively working to bring about political change in Eritrea and to unify opposition parties. He stated that his organization will stage a conference for opposition movements in December and the "Eritrean National Dialogue Congress" scheduled for March, both to be held in Addis Ababa. Idris called Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki a ruthless dictator with direct ties to Islamic terrorists, and said that he hopes to see significant political change in Asmara over the next year.

¶3. (SBU) Idris called the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement a "a piece of junk," and claimed that Eritrea is working to undermine the agreement and create chaos in the eastern Sudanese states of Red Sea, Kassala, and Gedaref. Idris's colleague, Awel Kheir, the Vice Chairman of the Eritrean Nahda Party, claimed that there is a division between the leaders of the Eastern Front, and predicted that the president of the Eastern Front, Musa Mohamed Ahmed, will soon resign from his position as assistant to President Omar Al-Bashir.

¶4. (SBU) Idris claims to have American, Eritrean, and Ethiopian citizenship. Idris last contacted Embassy Khartoum in May, 2007 to use consular services and to discuss the Nahda party. He said he has not returned to the U.S. since May, working since then in Addis Ababa. He claimed to be in regular contact with U.S. officials in Addis Ababa, the United Nations and NGO officials, and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Idris delivered a "memo to the government of the United States of America" to EconOff. This information has been forwarded to AF/SPG.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Idris appeared to us an unseasoned, and slightly desperate, activist-politician with unrealistic expectations about what the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum could do for his movement. Although some of his concerns may be valid, his unbalanced, unsubstantiated, and often emotional presentation led us to doubt much of what he said. However it bears reporting because he appears well connected to the Eritrean community in Sudan and Addis and

obviously is itching to find a way to undermine the regime in
Asmara. END COMMENT

FERNANDEZ